



For Immediate Release - August 10, 2021

Board of Health Mandates the Wearing of Masks in Public Indoor Spaces in the City of Northampton

NORTHAMPTON - On August 9th, 2021, the Northampton Board of Health voted unanimously to institute a mask order that requires the wearing of a mask in public indoor spaces. The Order requires all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, to wear a face covering when indoors in public settings, with limited exceptions, starting at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, August 11, 2021.

The Order is in response to the recent surge in COVID-19 cases across the state and locally in Northampton and surrounding communities. This rise in cases is largely attributed to the Delta Variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its sublineages, which now accounts for approximately 85% of positive cases in Massachusetts. The Delta variant is known to be almost twice as contagious as other common variants and both unvaccinated and vaccinated people can spread the virus. Indoor settings, whether public or private, present a higher risk for COVID-19 transmission, especially in settings with individuals from multiple different households.

"Unfortunately, this pandemic is not over," states Public Health Director, Merridith O'Leary. "It is ongoing and evolving. As a result, public health guidance and regulations must adapt to meet new demands and new threats. As we observe COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations rising rapidly in all our surrounding Massachusetts counties, and as we monitor our own increases in transmission in Northampton and Hampshire County, our goal is to stay one step ahead while we have that chance. As the last remaining county in Massachusetts not to reach a level of substantial or high transmission, our goal is to prevent this level of transmission from occurring and to prevent our public health and healthcare systems from once again becoming overwhelmed."

COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against severe illness with COVID-19 and its variants. Vaccine breakthrough cases are rare but do occur, and vaccine coverage is not consistent across all communities and age groups. While community transmission is occurring at a higher rate, securely fitting face coverings are a valuable risk reduction tool that should be used as an additional layer of protection to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Vaccines remain the most powerful tool in the fight against infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19, including infections with the Delta variant. Nonetheless, the Delta variant is infecting a small percentage of the vaccinated population and while these individuals are unlikely to become severely ill, we are learning that these individuals can still spread the virus. In those instances of infection in a vaccinated person, a face covering prevents further spread. The Northampton Health Director urges all unvaccinated residents 12 and older to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

The Northampton Health Department continues its ongoing vaccination efforts with three regular weekly clinics and pop-up locations throughout the region. Details about the regularly scheduled clinics and pop-up clinics are available at <https://northamptonma.gov/2219/Vaccine-Clinics>. The COVID-19 vaccine is free. Neither insurance nor ID are required. The clinics offer PfizerBioNTech and Johnson & Johnson Janssen vaccines for all members of the public.

Masks and signs are available at the Health Department. Please call ahead to arrange for pick up.

For more information, contact Public Health Director Merridith O'Leary at 413-587-1215, or at healthdept@northamptonma.gov